

**TESTIMONY OF
KATHLEEN SILARD
STAMFORD HEALTH
SUBMITTED TO THE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
Friday February 10, 2023**

Good afternoon. Stamford Health appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of **House Bill 5441, An Act Concerning College Graduates Who Work in the Fields of Education or Health Care in the State.**

Stamford Health is a comprehensive, independent non-profit health care system that serves a region of approximately 650,000 people. We employ more than 3,800 people, making us the largest employer in the city of Stamford and one of the largest in Fairfield County. Beyond the lifesaving care we provide 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, we contribute more than \$1 billion to our state and local economy and provide more than \$106 million in uncompensated care to the residents that need it most. We are committed to providing friendly, personal care coupled with the most sophisticated services to all residents of lower Fairfield County.

House Bill 5441 would establish a student loan forgiveness program or public-private partnership with the goal of encouraging graduates from institutions of higher education to pursue careers in teaching or health care in Connecticut.

Like all hospitals, Stamford Health has experienced workforce shortages across all levels of employment since the pandemic. We are grateful for the actions the legislature and the state have made to date such as providing funding for regional and local entities to train unemployed and underemployed individuals for careers in health care and other industries. We know that the health care industry provides good wages and excellent growth opportunities. We look forward to these pipeline programs providing candidates to join our workforce in the near future.

Stamford Health has also worked with institutions of higher education in Lower Fairfield County to help students obtain degrees, clinical licensure, and training to enter the nursing field. We support House Bill 5441 as an important complement to the state's efforts to date.

We know obtaining education and training is a significant financial investment by students – not only in terms of the cost of the education and training but also the time spent forgoing wages while they attend classes. Student debt diminishes graduates' ability to sustain themselves and their families and save for their future. Debt relief will help students participate in our economy and will increase the number of employees needed in areas where there are substantial shortages such as health care.

For the above reasons, Stamford Health recommends that the Higher Education and Employment Committee favorably report House Bill 5441. Thank you for your consideration of our position.